

occupies so large a place in the minds of the people as Worship of Nyakang, the traditional founder of the dynasty and the ^{Nyakan}g> ancestor of all the kings who have reigned after him to the present day. Of these kings the Shilluks have preserved the memory and the genealogy ; twenty-six seem to have sat on the throne since Nyakang, but the period of time covered by their reigns is much shorter than it would have been under conditions such as now prevail in Europe ; for down to the time when their country came under British rule it was the regular custom of the Shilluks to put their kings to death as soon as they showed serious symptoms of bodily or mental decay. The custom was based on " the conviction that the king must not be allowed to become ill or senile, lest with his diminishing vigour the cattle should sicken and fail to bear their increase, the crops should rot in the fields, and man, stricken with disease, should die in ever-increasing numbers."¹ It is said that Nyakang, like Romulus, disappeared in a great storm, which scattered all the people about him ; in their absence the king took a cloth, tied it tightly round his neck, and strangled himself. According to one account, that is the death which all his successors on the throne have died;² but while tradition appears to be unanimous as to the custom of regicide, it varies as to the precise mode in which the kings were relieved of their office and of life. But still the people are convinced that Nyakang did not really die but only vanished mysteriously away like the wind. When a missionary asked the Shilluks as to the manner of Nyakang's death, they were filled with amazement at his ignorance and stoutly maintained that he never died, for

were he to die all the Shilluks would die also.³ The graves of this deified king are shown in various parts of the country.

From time to time the spirit of Nyakang manifests itself The to his people in the form of an animal. Any creature of regal port or surpassing beauty may serve as his temporary supposed incarnation. Such among wild animals are lions, crocodiles, ^{lfes} little yellow snakes that crawl about men's houses, the finest certain sorts of antelopes, flamingoes with their rose-pink and scarlet ^{ammas*}

ⁱ C. G. Seligmann, *The Cult of People*, p. xlii.
Nyakang, p. 221.

⁵⁴ D. Westermann, *The Shilluk*

³ D. Westermann, *Lc.*